

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8239

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON IMMEDIATE

S E C R E T BEIRUT 638

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EXDIS

DEPT PASS SECRETARY'S PARTY FOR DAY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PFOR LE

SUBJECT: LEBANESE SITUATION TODAY

REF STATE 13817

1. TODAY WE SEEM TO BE JUST AT CROSSROADS. TRIUMPHANT PHALANGIST-CHAMOUNIST FORCES HAVE NEUTRALIZED QARANTINA POCKET AND THUS ESTABLISHED CONTROL OVER BEIRUT PORT AND ITS CONNECTION WITH MT. LEBANON HINTERLAND. IMMEDIATE THREAT IS TO NABAA DISTRICT, SOMEWHAT SOUTH OF QARANTINA, WHICH IS ALSO VIEWED AS TROUBLESOME POCKET BY CHRISTIAN RIGHT. TEL ZAATAR PALESTINIAN CAMP FURTHER SOUTH REMAINS CUT OFF. IT SEEMS PROBABLE THAT PHALANGIST-CHAMOUNT FORCES WILL ATTACK NABAA VERY SOON. MORE LIKELY THAN NOT THEY WOULD SHOW RESTRAINT ON TEL ZAATAR CAMP. HOWEVER, THERE IS GREAT GUNG-HO SPIRIT IN THESE RIGHTIST TROOPS, WHICH MAKES US WONDER WHETHER THEY WILL STOP OF THEIR OWN ACCORD OR WILL HAVE TO BE HALTED BY ESCALATED MILITARY OPPOSITION.

2. PLA FORCES MOVING INTO LEBANON FROM SYRIA AND OTHER WISE MOBILIZING HERE COULD CONCEIVABLY BE PREPARING

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FOR SOME MAJOR PUSH AFTER CURRENT UNSC DEBATE. HOWEVER,

WE BELIEVE ON BALANCE THAT THESE MAIN LINE PALESTINIANS WOULD PREFER TO AVOID SUCH CONFRONTATION AND ARE THERE PRIMARILY AS DETERRENT AND IF NEED BE, DEFENSIVE FORCE SHOULD PHALANGIST-CHOMOUNISTS CONTINUE TO TRY TO TAKE OVER NEW TERRITORY OR LEBANESE ARMY ENTER BATTLE MORE EXTENSIVELY AGAINST LEBANESE LEFT WING AND PALESTINIAN TROOPS.

3. WE ARE GETTING SOME GOOD REPORTS THAT ASAD-FRANGIE AGREEMENT MAY BE IN VIEW, THOUGH THAT IN TURN RAISES QUESTION WHETHER FRANGIE CAN DELIVER PHALANGISTS AND CHAMOUNISTS AND SYRIANS DELIVER ALL THE LEFT WING AND PALESTINIAN FORCES. KARAME REMAINS IN THE GAME AS PRIME MINISTER AND HAS CONSIDERABLE SYMBOLISM AS A MOSLEM PEACEMAKER BUT IS NOT A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR IN THE DIRECT MILITARY CONFRONTATION.

4. BRITISH AMBASSADOR WAKEFIELD CAME BY THIS MORNING TO DISCUSS SITUATION AND AGREES ENTIRELY WITH ABOVE ANALYSIS. WHEN HE RAISED WELFARE OF OUR CITIZENS IN VIEW OF CONTINUED CLOSURE OF AIRPORT, WE GOT TO DISCUSSING CONTINGENCY POSSIBILITIES REGARDING SEALIFT. HE AGREED WITH ME THAT SITUATION DOES NOT REPEAT NOT CALL FOR ALARM OR PRESSING ANY PANIC BUTTONS. I TOLD HIM THAT MY UNDERSTANDING IS 6TH FLEET PRESENTLY IN WESTERN MEDITERRANEAN, ABOUT 4 OR 5 DAYS SAILING TIME AWAY, AND HE AGREED THAT POTENTIAL POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF ANY MOVEMENT OF UNITS 6TH FLEET TO EASTERN MED AT THIS TIME CONTINUE TO OUTWEIGH VALUE OF SUCH PRESENCE HERE FOR CONTINGENCY EVACUATION PURPOSES. ON OTHER HAND, WE BOTH AGREED SOME SMALLER BRITISH SHIP PRESENCE IN NEARBY WATERS WOULD NOT HAVE SAME POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS AND MIGHT BE A PRUDENT MEASURE. AGAINST UNFORESEEABLE CONTINGENCIES. WAKEFIELD AGREED TO SEND A VERY QUIET PERSONAL MESSAGE TO HIS DEPARTMENT HEAD AT FCO LONDON INQUIRING AS TO WHEREABOUTS OF ANY BRITISH UNITS THAT MIGHT SERVE SUCH A PURPOSE. THIS WHOLE SUBJECT SHOULD THEREFORE BE TREATED WITH EXTREME CONFIDENTIALITY. I WOULD APPRECIATE IT IF EMBASSY LONDON DID NOT RAISE MATTER WITH FCO UNLESS APPROACHED FIRST.

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NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED SECRETARY'S PARTY.

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